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ON THE QUESTION OF THE PRE-EMPTIVE BLOW
BY GENERAL OF THE ARMY V. KURASOV
(Red Star, April 27, 1958)

Translated from the Russian by

Herbert S. Dinerstein

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May 12, 1958

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This article was published in the open press and not in a restricted journal. As one would expect, therefore, its aim is clearly political and propagandistic. It does not contain any genuine discussion or thesis about military matters. Its chief significance lies in the use of the term "pre-emptive" (uprezhdaioshchii). This is the first time, as far as the translator is aware, that this word has appeared in the open Soviet press, though it has appeared several times in Military Thought. In that restricted journal the term has been found only once in association with the word "preventive" (preventivnyi), and then for the purpose of making a clear distinction between preventive and pre-emptive war. In the present Red Star article, however, the two words are used interchangeably and both kinds of war are condemned as "means of attack and of unleashing war ... incompatible with the peaceful policy of the Soviet state, and ... with socialist ideology."

On the face of it the article is useless as a source of information about actual Soviet military calculations. It is a polemical production. But the mere fact that the terms "preventive" and "pre-emptive" are both used, where one would have been sufficient for the writer's purpose (since he implies they mean about the same thing), indicates that the writer, a general, was well aware of the distinction

normally made between the terms, i.e., a preventive war is one initiated to forestall a somewhat remote threat, at a time and place of the initiator's choosing, a pre-emptive war is one initiated to forestall an imminent threat upon receipt of unequivocal warning.

That the writer was aware of this distinction may be deduced also from his treatment of my article in Foreign Affairs. He vigorously denies the article's conclusion that "since 1955 the strategy of pre-emptive war, i.e., dealing the first blow against the opponent, has been officially adopted in the Soviet Union." He himself has equated "pre-emptive" with "preventive" for the purposes of propaganda, and he positively denies that this kind of war, war by surprise, is being planned by the Soviet Union. He tries to demonstrate by quotations that the U.S. is planning to "unleash" a war by surprise. He completely ignores the fact that the Foreign Affairs article quoted a Soviet disclaimer of any intention to undertake preventive war, and he does not mention my judgment that this disclaimer may well have been sincere, at least in current conditions.

Gener- Kurasov, then, achieved his propaganda purpose, not by falsification of the material he quotes, but by skillful selection and omission. In spite of his attempt to

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obscure the distinction between the two terms mentioned, the very fact that he used them both strongly implies that he himself did not equate them in his own mind.

The basic problem of modern times which agitates all peoples is the question of war and peace.

Despite the peaceful policy of the co-existence of states with different social structures, which the Soviet Union pursues, the reactionary circles of the imperialistic states, not reckoning with the will of the peoples, continues a policy directed toward the preparation of new aggressive wars.

In the Western bourgeois press, especially in the military press, questions are discussed connected with the preparation of and the methods for unleashing a future war. In this connection basic attention is devoted to the problem of surprise attack. In recent years the questions of unleashing "preventive war" and the question of dealing pre-emptive blows with the mass employment of nuclear weapons have been raised with increasing frequency.

The theories of surprise attack and of lightning and preventive wars are not new in the imperialistic states. They were actually employed in the wars of the twentieth century. As is known, during the Second World War Hitlerite Germany and imperialist Japan started war by surprise attack.


The appearance of new kinds of weapons, atomic and hydrogen bombs, ballistic and winged rockets, has resulted in the even wider dissemination of these theories in the West.

The idea of a surprise attack upon the Soviet Union and the countries of the people's democracies is propagated with especial insistence in the bourgeois press of the Western states. Let us turn to cases.

The military observer of the magazine United States Army Combat Forces Journal, Lloyd Norman, laid down the principal theory of nuclear war, naturally not without reservations, when he wrote in February 1954: "We will be the first to deal a blow; if necessary, we will begin war in order to fully enjoy the superiority in the initiative which may be decisive in atomic war...."

The columnist of the Daily Mirror, Drew Pearson, writing on the Gaither Committee report said on December 18, 1957: "In the report it is indicated that the first attack in modern atomic war will be so powerful that the country making the attack will probably be victorious. And inasmuch as the arms race is not in favor of the United States, the conclusion therefore arises: we cannot afford to wait. To speak plainly, this is preventive war."

Commenting on the meeting of the Senate Subcommittee on Military Preparedness, the Star newspaper reporter Edgar Prin wrote in his January 22, 1958, article: "Today the Secretary of Defense, McElroy, appeared before a closed session of the



Senate Subcommittee on Military Preparedness and answered questions on 'preventive war,' and on the new top secret report (a report prepared for the Army by The Johns Hopkins University) which took the position that the United States should adopt 'the strategy of the military offensive.' The Undersecretary of Defense, Quarles, appeared together with McElroy."

The former special advisor to the Navy, the retired Capt. Puletson, in a statement published in the magazine United States News and World Report of December 13, 1957, proposed that the Eisenhower Government "review the policy based on the concept of 'a massive retaliatory blow,' and build its own strategy on the principle of dealing a pre-emptive blow." The author writes: "What the United States must do is adopt a policy which Dulles once proposed and then discarded, the policy which permits the United States to select the time, place, and means for dealing a blow."

The same magazine printed the statement of the retired English Air Marshal Slessor in which he did not exclude the possibility that United States might deal the first and pre-emptive blow.

There is no doubt that these and other, similar statements inflame the war psychosis, poison the relationships between states, and intensify mutual suspicion.

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Recently a number of articles have appeared in the bourgeois press in which the authors seek to show that the proponent of pre-emptive blows is, they say, the Soviet Union. Thus, in the January issue of Foreign Affairs, Herbert Dinerstein writes that since 1955 the strategy of pre-emptive war, i.e., dealing the first blow against the opponent, has been officially adopted in the Soviet Union. This assertion is in crying contradiction to reality and is just an attempt to delude world public opinion.

In the course of the 40-year history of the Soviet state, the Communist Party and the Soviet Government have consistently conducted a policy of peace and friendship among peoples. This peace-loving foreign policy arises from the very essence of our socialist system. There are no classes or groups interested in war, in the seizure of other people's territory in the Soviet Union, or in the enslavement of other peoples. The Soviet people is interested in a firm and lasting peace which would give the opportunity to build a society where the general welfare would be secure, all peoples would flourish, and there would be a lasting peace among the nations.

It is for this very reason that one of the first decrees of the Soviet Government was the Decree on Peace adopted on November 8, 1917, in which it was proposed to all the warring

peoples and their governments that they immediately conclude a just and democratic peace.

After the Great October Socialist Revolution, the Communist Party, on the basis of its policy of peace, at first did not intend to create a standing army but preferred the militia system. Only the serious situation created as a result of the armed attack of the imperialists on the young Soviet republic forced the Soviet people to start to organize regular armed forces.

After the conclusion of the Civil War, the Soviet Union was the most active fighter for the maintenance and extension of peace among the peoples, making concrete proposals for disarmament at international conferences and in the League of Nations. At that time the Soviet people was alone in condemning Japanese aggression against China and Italian aggression against Abyssinia.


From the beginning of Hitlerite aggression in Europe, the Soviet Union resolutely took the part of small countries and peoples and was also the initiator of a system of collective security. However, the policy of "non-intervention" and "appeasement," pursued at that time by the governments of the Western nations, disrupted the organization of collective resistance to the aggressor and gave him the opportunity to unleash a new world war.

The Soviet people, which in that war defended the freedom and independence of its country, played a major role in the liberation of humanity from the threat of fascist slavery. In the postwar years, the Soviet Union has continued to conduct a firm struggle for peace and friendship with all the great and small countries regardless of their social and state structure.

In the decisions of the XXth Congress of the Communist Party it is said: "A most important task of the Soviet Union, the Socialist countries, and other peace-loving countries and the broad popular masses of all countries is the maintenance and strengthening of lasting peace and the prevention of a new war and new aggression."

On the basis of the Leninist principle of the peaceful co-existence of states with different political systems, the Communist Party and the Soviet Government has always sought the relaxation of international tension. The Soviet Union has consistently fought for peace, fought for the limitation of armaments and armed forces. Our country is the initiator of the proposal for the prohibition of the employment of atomic and nuclear weapons. In recent years the Soviet Union has reduced its armed forces by 2,140,000 men.

The decisive role which the Soviet Union has played in extinguishing the flames of war in Korea, Viet-Nam, and



Egypt, and in the prevention of the aggression against Syria,
is generally known.

The Soviet Union, in the interests of the reduction of international tension, has voluntarily renounced its military bases in other countries. Does not this fact alone show the falsity of the assertion that the U.S.S.R. is preparing "a preventive war"? Now there are no Soviet bases on foreign territories. Incidentally, it is always easier to start such a war from bases situated close to states which one is preparing to attack. Apparently, therefore, the U.S.A. is also preparing rocket bases closer to the Soviet Union. Consequently, accusations of the preparation of "a preventive war" can be leveled at the United States of America itself.

The concrete proposals of the government of the U.S.S.R. on the question of the abolition of the employment of outer space for military purposes, on the liquidation of foreign bases on other people's territories, and on international co-operation in the sphere of the study of outer space are a new step in the Soviet policy of peace.

In an effort to attain the great goal of sparing mankind the threat of atomic war, the Soviet Union has taken the decision to cease testing all sorts of atomic and hydrogen weapons unilaterally. The new peaceful initiative of the

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U.S.S.R. was praised by the peoples of the world as a bold and noble step of historical significance, which testifies to the fact that the Soviet Union is struggling for the maintenance of peace in deeds and not in words. If the U.S.S.R. nurtured any aggressive intentions, could it voluntarily renounce the perfection of nuclear weapons? There cannot be two opinions on this matter.

The Soviet Union has called upon the U.S.A. and England to adopt analagous measures so that the testing of nuclear weapons should be ended once and for all everywhere. However, these powers have refused to follow the Soviet example. The question naturally arises of why? Is it not because the ruling circles of these countries still hope to settle disputed international questions by force of arms?

The Soviet people cannot but devote attention to the report that the military command of the U.S.A. has already more than once sent strategic aircraft loaded with hydrogen bombs in the direction of the U.S.S.R. It is not necessary to say what a serious danger these provocational flights of American planes represent to the cause of peace.

The policy of "a position of strength," the policy of "the brink of war," and, finally, "preventive war" are all terms which were born not in the Soviet Union but in the

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U.S.A. It is in the U.S.A. and not in the U.S.S.R. that war propaganda continues, and that calls to aggression and marches of conquest are issued.

The Soviet Union possesses all the modern means for the conduct of war, but it is not seeking war. It does everything so that peace shall reign on earth, and so that disputed problems will be decided not on the battlefield but around the conference table.

One evidence of the peace-loving aspirations of the Soviet Union is the struggle for the speedy summons of a meeting at the highest level. At this meeting the leaders of states can exchange opinions on ways for the liquidation of "the cold war" and make the first steps in the solution of international problems which have become ripe and in the establishment of new healthy relations among the peoples of all countries.

The Soviet people think that this meeting cannot but help the accomplishment of such measures as the abolition of the tests of nuclear weapons by all countries having such weapons; the creation of a nuclear free zone in Central Europe; the conclusion of a non-aggression pact among the participants in the NATO and Warsaw pacts; the expansion of economic and cultural contacts; and the cessation of war propaganda. The meeting might also consider such questions

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as the abolition of the employment of outer space for military purposes, the liquidation of foreign military bases on other people's territory, and the conclusion of a German peace treaty, etc.

The proposal of the Soviet Union to summon a meeting at the highest level has found warm support in world public opinion. However, the Western powers have not yet expressed a desire to speed the calling of the conference. And this fact shows who is for the peaceful solution of disputed questions and who is against it.

As history shows, the Soviet Union has more than once suffered aggressive attacks and has been forced to conduct hard and bloody wars in order to defend its independence as a state. The study of the experience of the initial period of the Great Fatherland War could not but direct the attention of military thinking to the significance of the factor of surprise in modern wars. It became patently obvious that the surprise attack of the German fascist troops permitted them temporarily to seize the strategic initiative at the beginning of the war.

The appearance of nuclear weapons and the possibility for their mass employment against troops and targets in the rear produced different opinions on the significance of

surprise attack in a future war and on the measures for opposing such an attack. This prompted some military authors to engage in an investigation of the significance of the factor of surprise in modern war. And the theoretical statements in the press of individual authors on measures to frustrate an aggressor's surprise attack were interpreted in the Western press as a summons to pre-emptive war.

The Soviet Union was never the first to start a war and has only taken up arms to defend itself in all cases when it itself had suffered the attack of the enemy.

The ideas of "preventive war," and the dealing of a pre-emptive blow as a means of attack and of unleashing war, are incompatible with the peaceful policy of the Soviet state, and are incompatible with socialist ideology. These ideas do not correspond to the interests of the Soviet people who are building communism.


The Soviet Union is for the establishment of relations among states on the basis of peaceful co-existence. Moreover, occupied as they are in peaceful creative toil, the Soviet people cannot forget that imperialistic countries still exist whose ruling circles have not given up hopes for the annihilation of the socialist states. This forces the Soviet Union to strengthen its defensive capability in every way and

constantly to maintain the armed forces in full fighting readiness to repel the attack of the imperialist aggressors at any moment. The resolution of this task so vitally important for our people always has been and always will be the special concern of the Communist Party and the Soviet Government.

The interests of defense of the socialist fatherland demand an intense struggle for the execution of the decisions of the historic XXth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union to maintain the defense of the socialist state on the level of contemporary military technology and science, constantly to perfect the military training, to improve political party work in the Army, Air Force, and Navy, and vigilantly to guard the peaceful toil of the Soviet people and the great attainments of Socialism.

In their propaganda attacks against socialist countries, the imperialist circles and their agents direct their main efforts against the Soviet Union. They always seek to discredit the U.S.S.R. and try to accuse her of aggressive intentions.

But the Soviet Union has never threatened anyone with an attack, "preventive war," or dealing a pre-emptive blow. Always, beginning with the first days of the existence of the Soviet Union, the leaders of the Communist Party and of our



state have said that, in the event of an attack upon us, an immediate retaliatory blow will be dealt to the aggressor.

Naturally, the idea of dealing a retaliatory blow does not mean conducting only defensive actions. If any aggressor tried to make an attack upon us, the Soviet armed forces would conduct the most resolute aggressive action against him.

The great Lenin, foreseeing the possibility of an armed attack against our country, showed that given constant danger of war for us from world capitalism it was impossible to say that we would only defend ourselves. "If we," he said, "in the face of the constant and actively hostile forces should give the promise that they propose that we would never have recourse to certain actions which in the military strategic sense could be considered offensive, then we would not only be fools but criminals too."

In the years of the foreign military intervention and the Civil War of 1918-1920, as in the recent war with German fascism, the Soviet people gained victory in the last analysis as the result of the conduct of resolute offensive action against the aggressive forces which had attacked our Motherland.

The events of recent times show that the reactionary circles of the U.S.A., England, and some other imperialistic

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countries continue the policy of the arms race, hatch plans for an attack on the U.S.S.R. and other governments of the Socialist camp, and do not even stop at propagandizing "preventive war."

In response to this the Soviet armed forces must constantly improve their military readiness so that at any moment they can not only repel an aggressor's surprise attack against our country, but can immediately deal him a retaliatory blow of the kind that will once and for all put an end to any and all attempts to disturb by armed force the ordained movement of the Soviet people to communism.